

CRS Report for Congress

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Military Base Closures: Implementing the 2005 Round

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Summary

The first significant steps in implementing the new 2005 base closure law were formally announced by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld on November 15, 2002. These included development of a force structure plan, conducting a comprehensive inventory of military installations, and establishing criteria for selecting bases for closure or realignment. Concurrently, many communities near military facilities are experiencing anxiety about their future. Efforts, on their part, to protect these bases include improving infrastructure near bases and forming partnerships with the military. On Capitol Hill, some Members question the wisdom of conducting a new round at this time, when the national security environment is uncertain. On May 22, 2003, the House passed its FY2004 defense authorization bill (H.R. 1588). It contained a provision that would exempt half of domestic bases from being closed. On May 22, 2003, the Senate passed its version of the defense bill (S. 1050), in which it provided for a commission to review overseas bases. This report will be updated to reflect major developments.

Introduction¹

On November 15, 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a memorandum to senior staff regarding the implementation of the new round of base closures and realignments authorized by Congress in 2001.² He emphasized that, as part of Department of Defense's transformation initiative, "new force structures must be accompanied by a new base structure," and added that "BRAC 2005 should be the means by which we reconfigure our current infrastructure [bases] into one in which operational

¹ For prior information on BRAC rounds, see CRS Report RL30051, *Military Base Closures: Agreement on a 2005 Round*, by David E. Lockwood, 15 p.

² U.S. Congress, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002 (P.L. 107-107). Sections 3001-3007.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 09 MAY 2003		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2003 to 00-00-2003	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Military Base Closures: Implementing the 2005 Round				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 101 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC, 20540-7500				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 4	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

capacity maximizes both war fighting capability and efficiency.”³ He, then, directed that the process begin immediately. It was, in effect, the formal launching of DOD’s 2005 base closure implementation process.⁴

The Secretary of Defense also revealed in his memo a particularly important BRAC 2005 objective, namely examining and implementing opportunities for greater joint activity as a means of achieving a more efficient base structure. He explained that prior BRAC rounds had analyzed functions on a unique service-to-service approach and, therefore, did not benefit from joint examination of functions that cross services. It would appear, for example, that DOD’s network of more than 100 laboratories may become prime candidates for consolidation in the next round.

In respect to the selection process, Secretary Rumsfeld declared that DOD would not make any binding closure or realignment decisions prior to the submission of its final recommendations to the new BRAC commission in May 2005. It should be noted, however, that his statement left open the possibility (if not likelihood) of DOD conducting internal, non-binding deliberations.

To underscore the importance of the new BRAC round, Secretary Rumsfeld has created two Office of the Secretary of Defense-level groups to oversee and operate the BRAC 2005 process. First of these is the Infrastructure Executive Council (IEC), chaired by the Deputy Secretary. It serves as the policy-making and oversight body for the entire process. The second, subordinate group is the Infrastructure Steering Group (ISG), chaired by the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Testing, and Logistics). It will be responsible for the detailed direction necessary to conduct the BRAC 2005 analyses.

Early Requirements and Developments

In implementing the 2005 round, DOD’s first three requirements are (1) to develop a force structure plan, (2) to conduct a comprehensive inventory of military installations, and (3) to establish criteria for selecting bases for closure or realignment.

In regard to the first, the Secretary of Defense must **develop a force structure plan** based on an assessment of the probable threats to the national security over a 20-year period, beginning with fiscal year 2005. He is also required to estimate the end-strength levels and the major military force units needed to meet such threats. Finally, the Secretary of Defense must estimate the anticipated level of funding that will be necessary to carry out the plan.

Second, the Secretary of Defense is required to **conduct a comprehensive inventory** of U.S. military installations. He must, under the terms of the new BRAC law, determine the anticipated need and availability of military installations outside the United States. In addition, the Secretary of Defense must give special consideration to any efficiencies that might be gained from the use of joint tenancy by more than one branch of the Armed Forces at a military installation.

³ U.S. Department of Defense, *Transformation Through Base Realignment and Closure*, November 15, 2002.

⁴ Hereafter, any reference in this report to “closure” may also include “realignment.”

Third, the Secretary of Defense must **develop a set of criteria** for selecting bases for closure and realignment. He must address a broad range of military, fiscal, and environmental considerations likely to affect closure and realignment decisions. In prior rounds, DOD assigned highest priority to four criteria related to military value. An additional four included return on investment, economic impact, community infrastructure, and environmental impact. The eight final DOD selection criteria, as contained in the 1995 base closure commission report, are outlined below.

Military Value

1. Current and future mission requirements and impact on operational readiness of DOD's total force.
2. Availability and condition of land, facilities, and associated airspace at both the existing and potential receiving locations.
3. Ability to accommodate contingency, mobilization, and future total force requirements at both the existing and potential receiving locations.
4. Cost and manpower implications.

Return on Investment

5. Extent and timing of potential costs and savings, including the number of years, beginning with the date of completion of the closure or realignment, for the savings to exceed the costs.

Impacts

6. Economic impact on communities.
7. Ability of both existing and potential receiving communities' infrastructure to support forces, missions, and personnel.
8. Environmental impact.

Efforts to Prevent Military Base Closures⁵

As a result of the impending new round of base closures and realignments, many community leaders have searched for ways to protect nearby military installations. In their efforts, they have received much encouragement and financial support from their respective state and local governments. Millions of dollars are currently being spent to improve the infrastructure near bases, with the intent of ensuring their survival.

⁵ The information provided in this section, as well as in the next, is derived in large part from two articles by George Cahlink: "Bracing for Closure," *Government Executive*, Aug. 1, 2001; and "White House Threatens Veto of Defense Bill over Limits on Base Closure," *Government Executive*, May 23, 2003.

In 2001, the state of California provided \$400,000 in “retention grants” to help local communities hold on to their bases and weapons programs. As an example, the state awarded \$50,000 to Lancaster, CA to study the design of an instrumentation and calibration system involving the Joint Strike Fighter at Edwards Air Force Base. Other grants have been awarded to (1) establish links between military bases and state universities; (2) utilize the potential for public-private partnerships; and (3) consider exchanging military land with private developers in return for building new base facilities.

In another example, a non-profit community organization in Shreveport, LA offered to build and refurbish more than 300 housing units at Barksdale Air Force Base — at no additional cost to DOD. The offer was made after many complaints about the inadequacy of its military housing.

When asked for advice on how to prevent base closures, one leading former defense official answered that the communities should emphasize existing strengths and new partnerships with the military. “Our advice to the communities,” he said, “was always the same — make sure the strengths of your facility are known.”

Current BRAC- Related Developments

On May 22, 2003, the House passed its defense authorization bill (H.R. 1588). It included a provision that would exempt half of domestic bases from being closed. The bill also would require the Department of Defense to maintain a sufficient number of bases to handle a surge in military forces in the event of a future crisis.

Also, on May 22, 2003, the Senate passed its version of the defense bill (S. 1050). It did not contain any significant domestic base closure issue but did provide authority for creation of a commission to review overseas bases. On the previous day, the White House had threatened to veto any bill if it included language delaying or canceling DOD’s ability to conduct another round of closures.⁶

On June 4, 2002, Sen. Robert Dorgan offered an amendment to repeal the authority for a new base closure round in 2005. He explained that: “At this time, we have not properly assessed our needs. We are at war. It sends a terrible signal, and it is bad for the economy.” He later suggested that, perhaps, delaying the next round to 2006 might be worth considering.⁷

Letters sent to the committee by Pentagon officials argued otherwise. They stressed how overburdened DOD was with an infrastructure that is simply no longer needed to support the size of the U.S. forces. The Secretary of Defense wrote that “BRAC provides the opportunity to configure our infrastructure to maximize capability and efficiency.”⁸

⁶ Carolyn Skorneck and Pat Towell, “House, Senate Pass Different Versions of Defense Authorization Measure,” *CQ Today*, May 23, 2003.

⁷ U.S. Government Printing Office. *Congressional Record*. June 4, 2003, p. S7288.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. S7289.